

## European Invasion at KOP Mall: French kids' retailer Orchestra is the latest

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French champagne and wine were flowing at the V.I.P. reception for Orchestra, France's premiere baby/children's fashion retailer and the sixth largest in the world - on Monday night.

In a 4,400-square foot space on the second level of upscale King of Prussia Mall, catty corner from the J.C. Penney, guests - most of whom were from the French community on the Main Line and employees at the French American Chamber of Commerce - were treated to French biscuit "gavotte" for dessert to celebrate Orchestra's first store in the United States.

"The opportunity was there," said Pierre Mestre, the founder and Chairman of the Board of Orchestra Premaman, on why after conquering every other continent - including Asia and North Africa - the brand finally made its way onto American turf.

Doors under the big signage, "Orchestra - French Fashion for Kids" officially opened to the public at 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

Mestre founded the company with wife Chantel (who remains the company's artistic director) in the south of France 23 years ago. Agathe Boidin, the American CEO of Orchestra, relocated from France to the Philadelphia area, with her spouse and three children last year to lay the ground work for the new KOP store.

In April, the company launched its first [English-language retail website](#).

It just inked a partnership with Destination Maternity to sell baby clothes at 17 Destination Maternity stores on the East Coast, using the "shop in a shop" concept. This was announced at Monday's reception.

The first four locations will be Cherry Hill Mall, the Shops at Liberty Place downtown, Neshaminy Mall and Quaker Bridge Mall, all starting next week. The Orchestra baby clothes fit newborns up to 2 years old.

"We are thrilled to finally introduce Orchestra's stand-out fashions to the U.S.," Boidin said. "King of Prussia is a top three mall in the United States, so our product and concept will be seen by a lot of customers."

"Big," Mestre said with a chuckle when asked how the U.S. was viewed by Europeans. Then added, "It's the most educated market in the world."

In the last 18 months, no fewer than [15 European retailers](#) have moved in, most into the [mall's new luxury wing](#). They are: Jimmy Choo, Superdry, Bottega Veneta, Kneipp, MCM, ECCO, Le Creuset, Fendi, Bulgari, COS, Marc Cain, Clarins, Suitsupply and Philipp Plein.

As the 15th one, Orchestra is among a wave of highly successful “fast fashion” retailers known for churning out new designs rapidly (more than 3,000 designs produced each season), selling huge volumes (90 million pieces sold annually) and charging dirt cheap prices (\$2.25 for a girl’s tank top , \$11.95 for a skirt).

With over 600 stores worldwide in 40 countries, Orchestra has also built an enviable distribution network. Over 100 new items can be shipped to any store each week.

John Krause, First Vice President at commercial real estate firm, CBRE, Inc., who brokered the deal to bring Orchestra to KOP, said the brand strategically selected the Philadelphia MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) for its first American store.

“Opening the first store in one of the top malls in the country, and one that continues to improve its offerings and merchandising, is an incredibly exciting start,” Krause said. “Given the current marketplace is not yielding many new retail concepts, this is a big win for both Philadelphia and Orchestra.”

Kathy Smith, Director of Marketing & Business Development at King of Prussia Mall, said there is no shortage of retailers wanting to get in.

"King of Prussia is one of the most iconic retail properties in the world. Both domestic and international retailers recognize our draw and are eager to be a part of the center," she said on Monday.

Chris Daiss, Director of Retail Operations for shoemaker ECCO's expansion in the U.S., couldn't agree more. Denmark-based ECCO debuted its first store in Pennsylvania last month at the mall.

"To be among best-in-class brands collected under the iconic roof that is the King of Prussia Mall is vital to our future success," Daiss wrote in an email. "We feel a sense of pride for having our new store in this beautiful location and have the best possible chance for ECCO to be presented and understood in its purest form."

There might be an element of familiarity as well.

“In market towns in Europe or Asia, there was that place everyone went to shop,” said Adam Ducker, managing director at RCLCO, a real estate advisory firm based in Washington. “If you went down the streets of 17th century Bangkok or Paris, all of the vendors and specialties were located together because people gravitated to where there was critical mass, volume, diversity and energy.”

Boidin alluded to that vibe: “I love the positive energy. Everyone believes in the project.”

Mestre said Orchestra has plans to open more stores later this year in the U.S. He cited H&M, Gap and Gymboree as the main competition in kids wear.

“Our taste and style has an opportunity in the United States,” he said. “It has to be proven, of course, but we are optimistic. We compete already with H&M and Zara in all the European countries for kids’ clothes. We are French-style at an affordable price.”